

Chapter 4

Chapter 4: After a long and exhausting visit to the prison, Parvana and her mother returned home, their bodies weighed down by fatigue. Parvana, drained from the journey, leaned heavily on her mother for support, feeling every ache in her body. As she removed her sandals, Parvana was horrified to see the state of her feet, covered in blisters and blood. Her mother's condition was far worse, and it became clear to Parvana that her mother hadn't stepped outside since the Taliban had taken control of Kabul a year and a half ago. She had chosen to stay inside, comforted by the idea her husband had given her—to stay home and write when she could, rather than risk venturing out into the increasingly hostile world outside.

Parvana's father had always insisted that Fatana, her mother, needed to observe the world around her to capture its essence in her writing. He believed it was crucial for her to stay informed and engaged, despite the growing danger. Despite his gentle encouragement, a truce had emerged between them; he had believed that the educated, like his wife, should stay and help rebuild Afghanistan rather than fleeing the country. Parvana hadn't been aware of the toll that their trek had taken on her mother, nor the emotional strain she had been enduring. Now, as her mother's exhaustion and despair became clear, Parvana realized the weight of her mother's decision to stay, one that had been marked by silent sacrifice and the slow erosion of her spirit.

When they finally reached home, her mother collapsed onto the toshak, too overcome with exhaustion and emotion to even respond to Nooria's attempts to assist her. Parvana, though exhausted herself, was too focused on the concerns surrounding their missing father to pay much attention to her mother's breakdown. Instead, Maryam, Parvana's younger sister, did her best to comfort her, though her efforts seemed insufficient to alleviate Parvana's pain. Parvana shared her worries with Nooria,

confessing that no news had come about their father. The family's uncertainty about his whereabouts weighed heavily on them all, and Parvana was left to grapple with the immense emotional toll of not knowing if her father was alive or dead. As night fell, Parvana's troubled sleep was filled with dreams of soldiers, their harshness echoing in her mind, while her mother continued to show signs of distress.

The next morning, Parvana was shocked to find her mother still lying on the toshak, unresponsive to the family's attempts to offer her food. The days passed slowly, with the atmosphere in the house growing more tense as their supplies dwindled. Parvana and Nooria did their best to keep the younger children calm, but the burden of their situation weighed heavily on them. With food becoming scarce, Parvana was forced to confront the harsh reality that they had no more provisions. In an attempt to rouse her mother from her depression, Parvana spoke to her softly, but Nooria stopped her, telling Parvana that their mother was far beyond the reach of comfort or reason. Their mother was in the grip of a deep sadness, one that couldn't be easily overcome, and Nooria explained that they would need to face the possibility of survival without her immediate help.

Frustration began to build between the sisters as the prospect of starvation loomed closer. Parvana's feet, still sore from the journey, ached with each step, but the pressing need to feed her family motivated her to act. Seeing the desperate faces of her younger siblings, Parvana made the difficult decision to venture out into the world beyond their home in search of food. This moment marked a significant shift in her role within the family, as the responsibility to provide for their survival began to fall on her shoulders. It was no longer just a matter of survival for her mother and father—it had become Parvana's responsibility to care for the family, no matter the cost. The weight of this new role was immense, but Parvana knew it was something she had to do to keep her family alive, marking a turning point in her own journey toward independence and resilience.